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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/30/2018
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION PARTIES UNITE TO CONDEMN
CHAVEZ' SABER RATTLING

Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor, for Reason 1.4(d)

11. (SBU) Summary: Within hours of President Hugo Chavez' March 2 order to mobilize the Venezuelan National Armed Forces against a "Colombian invasion," Venezuelan opposition members were responding to the belligerent rhetoric with equally breathless criticism. Beneath a banner reading "United for Venezuela", the leaders of ten opposition parties met in Caracas March 3 and called attention to Venezuela's more pressing problems, (crime, poverty, food scarcity), criticizing Chavez for letting his personal animosity take Venezuela to the brink of war with Colombia. Various Spanish language forums and blogs indicated that Chavez' call for a moment of silence in honor of Raul Reyes alienated many Venezuelans, especially after Chavez did nothing to memorialize the deaths of 46 countrymen in an aviation accident the previous week. End Summary.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

12. (SBU) Accion Democratica (AD) Secretary General Henry Ramos Allup, described President Chavez as a "sociopath" following Chavez' March 2 order to send ten battalions to the Colombian border. Julio Borges, national coordinator of Primero Justicia summed up Chavez as having "Gone completely crazy, looking for fights everywhere," adding that Venezuelans should not follow the president in his obsession for war. The COPEI party head in the border state of Tachira said the only difference between the Venezuelan and Colombian people is in the "delirious ideology" of Chavez. Separately, PODEMOS Secretary General Ismael Garcia said Chavez was "looking for a situation to cover up the reality in Venezuela." Garcia also took issue with the moment of silence for Reyes.

NO SECOND THOUGHTS

13. (SBU) Zulia governor Manuel Rosales described Chavez' plan to send 5,000 - 6,000 soldiers to the Colombian border as "treason to the fatherland." The former presidential candidate and founder of the Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT) party was spokesman for a group of 10 opposition parties, not including PODEMOS, that met in Caracas March 3. Rosales dished out more measured criticism by calling attention to Venezuela's more pressing problems, (crime, poverty, food scarcity) and criticizing Chavez for letting his personal animosity possibly take Venezuela to the brink of war with Colombia. AD leader Henry Ramos argued that Chavez had given an unlawful order, without debate or consent of the National Assembly, and he urged soldiers to refuse to obey orders to deploy. The group criticized Chavez for being silent when

the FARC killed political leaders, mayors and governors in Colombia or violated Venezuelan sovereignty to kidnap Venezuelans, extort money and drive farmers off their lands in the border area.

BLOGOSPHERE BUZZING

14. (SBU) Opinion among wired Venezuelans is running strongly against Chavez and his bellicose rhetoric. Like the opposition leaders, they resent Chavez' interest in foreign affairs when there are so many domestic problems to deal with. Furthermore, Chavez' call for a national moment of silence on March 2 in honor of the fallen FARC leader deeply offended many Venezuelans who note that Chavez did nothing after a plane crash killed 46 citizens in the state of Merida a week earlier. (Note: Text messaging and video streaming were key advantages students had in the RCTV protests and the rejection of constitutional reforms. End Note.)

15. (C) Comment: The opposition will likely use every perceived mistake by Chavez to gain ground politically and to point out his failures to address the serious social and economic problems of the country. For his part, Chavez is almost certain to accuse opposition leaders as "unpatriotic " and "lackeys of the U.S. empire." There is already local speculation that Chavez will use this conflict as a pre-text to expand the power of the executive and further reduce political freedoms. End Comment.
DUDDY